

New Zealand, Marlborough: How to Make a Marlborough Quilt

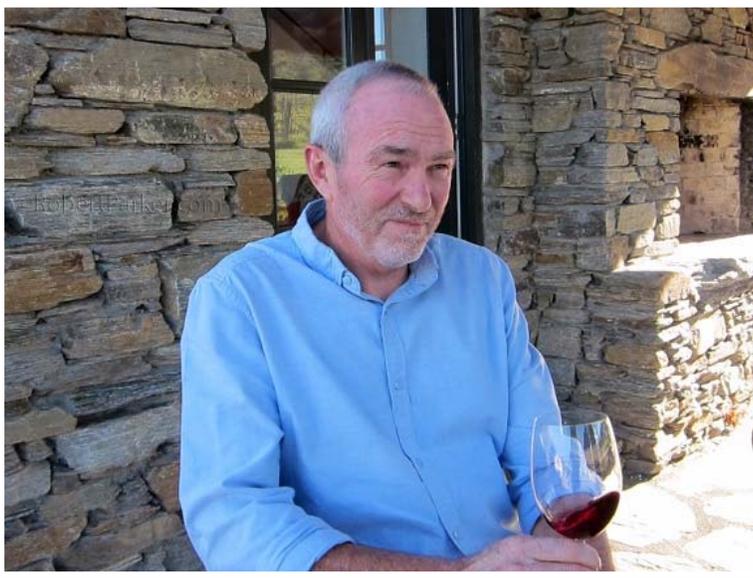
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Last year for the first time for the Wine Advocate, I decided to split my one large New Zealand report of the year into three reports, two that were regionally focused (Waiheke Island and Martinborough) and one that covered the rest of the country's wines. I've done the same this year, this time with spotlight focuses on two of New Zealand's most well-known regions: Marlborough and Central Otago.

Marlborough is quite possibly the greatest new-region success story of our lifetimes. In fact, I pushed it forward as a positive role model in a "China Wine Industry Summit" speech I recently gave at ProWine in Shanghai on the topic of, "Opportunities and Pitfalls for Foreign Investment in the Chinese wine growing industry from an international viewpoint." Wine, most notably Sauvignon Blanc, has only really been produced in Marlborough on a significant commercial scale since the early 1980s. In fact, the story pretty much began in 1973 when Montana purchased a large swath of vineyard land in parcels in Marlborough for about NZ\$100-250 per hectare. By 1979 another early pioneer, Ernie Hunter (of Hunter's) bought land there for \$3000 / ha. Now viticultural land is selling at around \$120,000 / ha...and that's come down a lot since the real estate peak in 2007/8 of \$250,000 (before the oversupply situation caused by the large 2008 crops).

Today, 72% of the wine produced in New Zealand is Sauvignon Blanc and 86% of NZ's wine exports are mono-varietal wines of this grape. And out of the 20,027 hectares of Sauvignon Blanc planted in NZ, nearly 90% of this is planted in Marlborough. So Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc is BIG business for NZ. Of course the question on everyone's lips is how sustainable is this overwhelming reliance on one grape / style?



One of the early pioneers of Marlborough, winemaker Kevin Judd was instrumental in the early success of Cloudy Bay before setting out on his own to establish the exciting Greywacke label a few years ago.

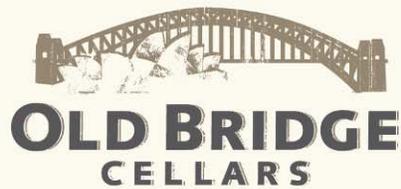


After a somewhat lackluster visit to Marlborough a few years ago, I wrote that the region appeared like someone had randomly thrown a giant Sauvignon Blanc blanket over it. Indeed, for a while there it looked like Marlborough was in danger of becoming a victim of its own success. The dark side of this success story was evident by the early noughties: the overwhelming consumer demand for that Marlborough-Sauvignon-taste had many large companies throwing differentiation (beyond brand name and label design) to the wind. It became easy to employ economies of scale towards producing vast yields and staggering volumes of everyday, affordable, me-too Brand Marlborough blandness, which pandered to lowest common denominator taste. Don't get me wrong, these brands were/are still way better than their lower to mid-price point counterparts from most other wine regions of the world. The consistency of quality and style achieved was/is truly remarkable. But what happens when even the lowest common denominator gets bored of that taste? With very little else featured on Marlborough's wine list, the cleverest producers including most of the major brand owners soon realized that too much of a good thing is never a good thing and they were going to have to mix the offering up or risk having their grapes all in one basket.

Sub-region, complexity and ageability are the buzz-words these days in Marlborough. More and more producers such as Astrolabe are looking to highlight sub-regional differences with dedicated bottlings from the Wairau Valley, the Awatere and Kekerengu, if not single vineyard and block wines. At the same time a growing number of producers are encouraged by the success of Cloudy Bay's ground-breaking Te Koko and developing their own take on barrel fermented, wild yeast styles of Sauvignon Blanc that have real ageing potential. And who better to refine this style than former Cloudy Bay winemakers Kevin Judd (now doing his signature "Wild" thing under the Greywacke label) and Ivan Sutherland / James Healy at Dog Point. These two producers in particular are also now forging some of the region's finest Chardonnays. Meanwhile the "Southern Valleys" sub-region is developing into a stand-out region for Pinot Noirs (particularly on the hillside sites) with Fromm, Dog Point, Terravin, Churton, Spy Valley, Clos Henri and Auntsfield leading the pack. I'd like to think that these recent changes in production ambitions mark where we begin to see that Sauvignon Blanc blanket over the region being redeveloped into a Marlborough patch-work quilt, focusing on differentiation achieved both with new styles of the hugely successful Sauvignon Blanc grape and with other terroir compatible grape varieties.

Score Summary:

93 pts	Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2012
91-93 pts	Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2013
92+ pts	Greywacke Pinot Noir 2012
92 pts	Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2011
92 pts	Greywacke Chardonnay 2012
92 pts	Greywacke Chardonnay 2011
92 pts	Greywacke Chardonnay 2010
92 pts	Greywacke Late Harvest Gewurztraminer 2009
91 pts	Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2010
91 pts	Greywacke Pinot Noir 2009
91 pts	Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc 2014



91 pts	Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc 2013
90+ pts	Greywacke Late Harvest Riesling 2013
90 pts	Greywacke Riesling 2011
89 pts	Greywacke Pinot Gris 2013

Full Reviews:

I met-up with legendary Marlborough winemaker and very talented photographer Kevin Judd in Central Otago this trip. Along with the new releases, he presented me with a vertical tasting of The “Wild Sauvignon Blanc” to demonstrate how it ages. Kevin Judd (who, I should probably point out, was one of the founders and the former winemaker at Cloudy Bay), was emphatically not looking to reinvent Cloudy Bay's Te Koko with this wine. And although it too is a barrel fermented style, this is where the similarities end. Produced from a sub-set of the batches that go into his straight Sauvignon Blanc label, for this wine he is looking for a riper cross section of batches with slightly higher alcohol. So ten different batches usually compose the wine. The real difference between these two styles is in the fermentations. With the Wild, it is wild, i.e. all natural fermentation and malo-lactic. He begins with clear juice so as not to produce too much of that (currently trendy) sulfide character. Fermented in oak - 7% new, Mercury French oak, lightly toasted - the wine is unsulfured until it comes out of barrel. 2/3 -3/4 of the barrels go through malo-lactic. It is then transferred to tank and stirred on lees in the tank. In contrast to Te Koko, which is in some ways more about the winemaking, with this wine Judd told me he wanted to show more of the Sauvignon Blanc fruit, and and is ultimately looking to forge a fresher, more varietally expressive style.

93 pts Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2012

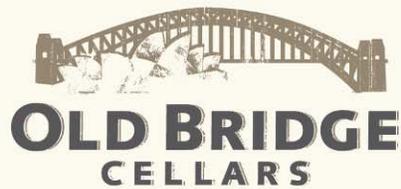
The 2012 Wild Sauvignon is just gorgeous – showing lovely cut herb, lemongrass, honeyed toast, hay and ginger on a nose that also has a wonderful toastiness to it. The palate is very crisp, light to medium-bodied, and has an elegant and fresh expression through the very long finish with herbal and ginger-laced nuances.

91-93 pts Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2013

The 2013 Wild Sauvignon was a tank sample about to be bottled. It opens to a gorgeous and complex floral nose laced with clover honey and yeasty notes, plus hints of almonds. Medium-bodied, this elegant Sauvignon Blanc is yeasty and toasty, and shows long in the finish.

92+ pts Greywacke Pinot Noir 2012

Made with grapes coming from a 15 year old vineyard in the Brancott Valley, just down the road from Clayvin, that is planted mainly with 777, 115 and 667 clones, the medium to deep ruby-purple colored 2012 Pinot Noir reveals aromas of red currants, black cherries and raspberry leaves with some loamy characters plus hints of roses and black tea. The concentrated, medium-bodied palate has a great savory fruit character supported by firm, grainy tannins through the long, earthy finish. It is very taut and needs time.



92 pts Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2011

The 2011 Wild Sauvignon has more of a struck match, sulfide nose revealing nuances of baking bread, passion fruit, warm lemons and apple tart. Light to medium-bodied with great texture and freshness, it has a long, lemony and savory line to the finish.

92 pts Greywacke Chardonnay 2012

The 2012 Chardonnay is made from all Mendoza and Clone 95 clones and undergoes full malolactic fermentation. On the nose it gives lovely white peach, apricot and warm apple notes with nuances of cashews, toast and ginger. The very elegant, medium-bodied palate is fine and fresh through the long, creamy finish. This is a more gentle and reticent expression - both mineral and fine - and should age well.

92 pts Greywacke Chardonnay 2011

The 2011 Chardonnay opens with some sulfides on the nose before tons of vibrant stone fruit and grapefruit characters emerge along with notes of ginger and honey, baking bread and almonds. Medium-bodied with tons of flavor, the sulphide notes lend a savoriness on the palate melding with a citrusy lift in the long finish.

92 pts Greywacke Chardonnay 2010

The 2010 Chardonnay exudes savory, sulfide notes over warm apricots and tropical fruits. Medium-bodied and elegant in the mouth, this Chardonnay is aging very gracefully and concludes with a long, mineral finish.

92 pts Greywacke Late Harvest Gewurztraminer 2009

The 2009 Late Harvest Gewurztraminer is redolent of lovely dried pineapple, rose water and lemon marmalade aromas plus nuances of dried apricots and musk. The palate is as equally lovely and sweet as the seductive nose with 90 grams per liter of residual sugar lending a rich and unctuous texture to the long finish.

91 pts Greywacke Wild Sauvignon 2010

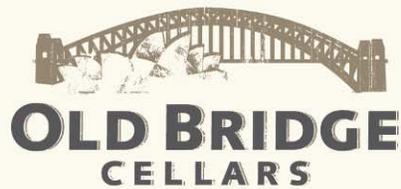
The 2010 Wild Sauvignon is evolving into a fresh hay, straw and honeyed character. The light-bodied palate has dried apricot flavors and a fresh, clean and long finish that is a little earthy.

91 pts Greywacke Pinot Noir 2009

Medium ruby colored, the 2009 Pinot Noir is ageing wonderfully. The nose offers warm berry and earthy aromas while the medium-bodied palate is elegant and showing some chewy tannins on the long finish.

91 pts Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc 2014

The 2014 Sauvignon Blanc exudes a slightly yeasty / savory fruit nose with plenty of lemon and lime character presiding over nuances of lightly browned toast, white blossoms and coriander seed. There's also some coriander coming through on the elegantly fruited palate that also has a nice suggestion of minerals on the long finish.



91 pts Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc 2013

The 2013 Sauvignon Blanc presents very pleasant lemon peel, musk perfume, passion fruit and baking bread nose with hints of lemongrass and orange blossom. Light to medium-bodied, it has great restraint and a quiet intensity, plus plenty of savory characters mixed in with citrus flavors. It finishes long with a lovely herbal lift.

90+ pts Greywacke Late Harvest Riesling 2013

The 2013 Riesling is made with 50% wild ferment in old barrels and has 20 grams per liter of residual sugar. The nose has gorgeous lime juice, lime leaves and acacia honey aromas with nuances of orange peel and baker's yeast. Very fine and fresh in the mouth, it finishes off-dry with a wonderful persistence.

90 pts Greywacke Riesling 2011

The 2011 Riesling is aging beautifully and at this stage showing straw and lemongrass with some lime cordial on the nose. In the mouth it is fine and elegant, and finishes long.

89 pts Greywacke Pinot Gris 2013

The 2013 Pinot Gris is going for more wild ferment with the Gris; it is made with mainly Mission clone fruit all in old oak with 10 grams per liter of residual sugar. It opens with a yeasty, toasty and spicy nose dotted with allspice, delicate peachy notes and a lemon drop lift. Medium-bodied with touch of sweetness, it has a creamy texture, moderate acidity and a long, savory finish.